

Designs

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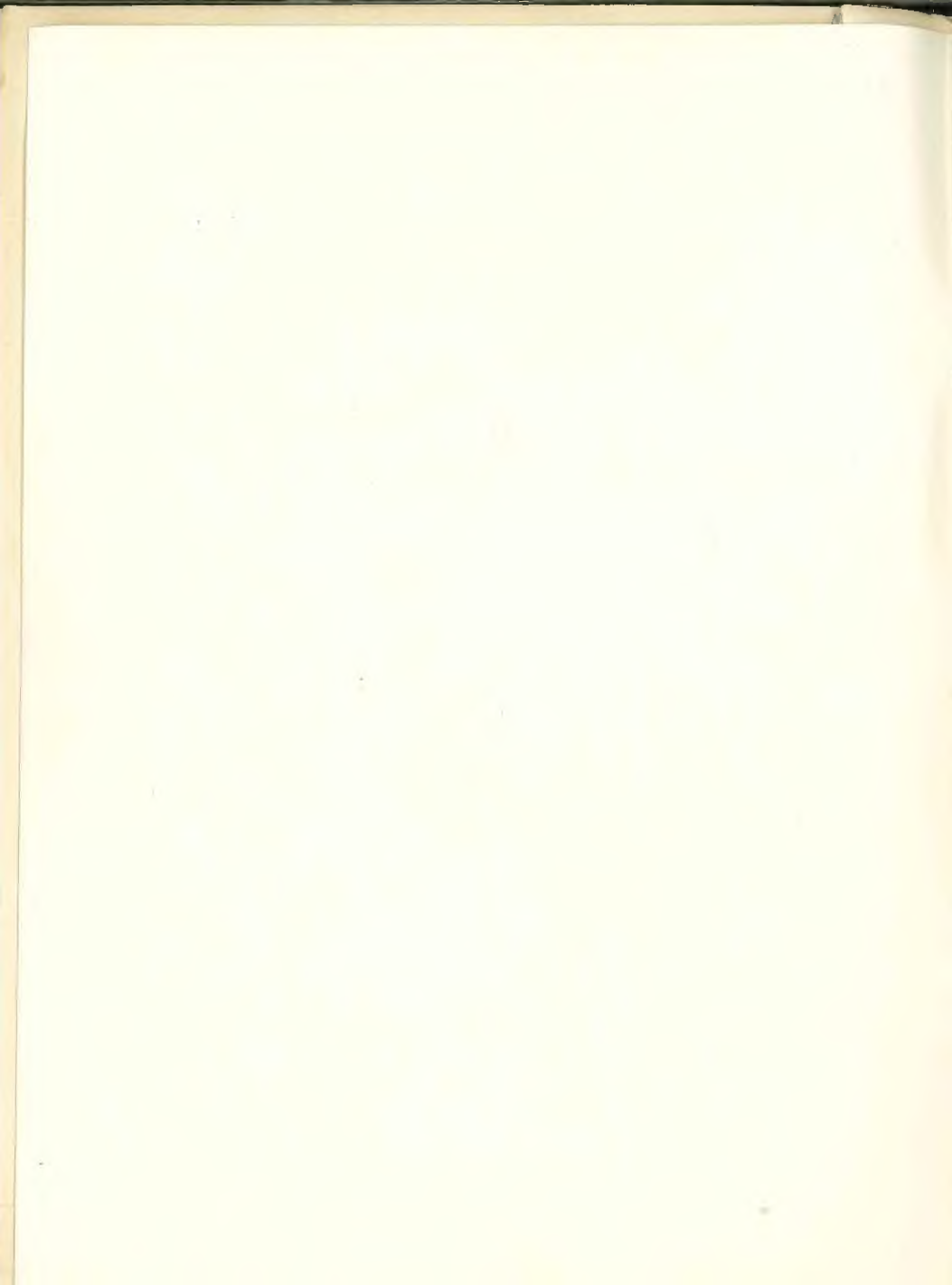


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SPODE'S **L**OWESTOFT

THE COVER REPRODUCES A
SPODE'S LOWESTOFT PLATE
WITH PINK CROSS-BAR
BORDER, ENRICHED WITH
FLOWER AND LEAF SPRAYS
IN CRIMSON, PURPLE AND
RICH GREEN :: GOLD AND
RED SPEAR-HEAD VERGE



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

TO many people the term *Lowestoft china* has come to mean heirloom china. There are excellent reasons for this. Of the old family tableware that has been handed down from generation to generation since the mid-1700's, and whose original ownership is still identifiable by a decorative coat of arms, armorial crest, or personal monogram, that which is known as Lowestoft is the greatest in quantity, the most fascinatingly beautiful, the most historically interesting, and hence the most highly prized.

The story of this ware carries us back to the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth, continues through the century when England became mistress of the Seven Seas, illuminates the early days of America's post-Revolutionary trade with the

Far East, and, even yet, is not concluded. So long a narrative cannot here be repeated in detail, but it may, at least, be outlined.

THE POVERTY OF EARLY TABLES

Today, when even the simplest home may spread its dining table with white or creamy surfaced dishes, cheery with bright colored decoration, we find it hard to realize that our ancestors of little more than two hundred years ago—even the wealthiest of them—enjoyed no such luxury. Certainly, until well after the year 1700, most people ate their meals from wooden trenchers, from dishes of coarse glazed clay, from pewter plates, or, if they were of exalted station, at times from silver or gold. Each of these materials offered drawbacks: wooden trenchers, however faithfully scraped, could not be kept really clean; the glaze of coarse clay dishes developed cracks through which grease was absorbed by the clay itself; plates of metal were heavy and became scratched and bent with use. But there seemed to be no way of improving the situation.

As late as 1694, a chatty German book on house-keeping and cookery thus describes the situation as it existed on the Continent at that time:

“Utensils from which one eats are most elegant if of silver, but a whole silver service would cost quite 6,000 thalers. Next in order would be a service of good English pewter, costing perhaps 100 thalers. But now-a-days one can get pewter also from India and Malacca. There is little advantage in buying cheap pewter, for it is heavy, and therefore one must get much more because of the weight. Domestic



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QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S PATTERN—Selected on her Majesty's visit to the Spode factory in 1817. Decorated in blue with butterfly border and Chinese landscape center.

find it heavy, too, in use. Not only this, but it is easily bent by knocks, and then it has to be melted down. In Holland, Friesland, Hamburg, and other places where one can turn navigation to account, blue-and-white earthenware is sometimes used, and is considered very satisfactory because of its cleanness. Genteel people procure this table-china even from Venice and use it instead of silver or pewter services in spite of its extreme fragility. Yet, when one thinks of how often sulky cookmaids bend and batter pewter by dashing it to the ground, how often they reduce it to nought by over-violent scouring with sand, it seems that the risk is as great with one as with the other, if the handling is not too careless. I cannot pretend that china is as costly as silver, but it is far cleaner in use; it is also much pleasanter and better to use for hot food. Utensils of serpentine (stone-ware) can already be had in Leipzig, and it is good and clean to use."

The table china here referred to is doubtless the heavy and porous faience, or tin-glazed ware, of Italy. The German "serpentine" was, in body and texture, very nearly the equivalent of what is used today for kitchen jugs and crocks.

THE COMING OF CHINESE PORCELAIN

And then came the discovery of an overseas route to the mysterious coasts of Asia, and, almost immediately, the formation of great trading organizations—the famous East India Companies of the different European nations. These companies sent their vessels to China, and brought them back laden with all the marvelous products in whose making that



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BAMBOO AND ROSE BORDER.—A delicately colored border in Chinese *famille rose* design, with gold rim, and gold and red chain verge. Armorial center. See Sir Algernon Tudor-Craig's, *English Armorial China of the Eighteenth Century*, page 53.

ancient Empire excelled — silks, lacquers, fans, embroideries, paintings on glass, and, most important of all, a new kind of tableware, light in weight, easily handled, beautifully shaped, with a shining surface that would not crackle and absorb grease. Moreover, it was delightfully decorated with all kinds of curious ornaments — birds and flowers, pagodas and houses with curly roofs, exotic landscapes, and marvelous dragons. This ware was the famous *porcelain* of the East. It had been known for centuries as a curiosity. Queen Elizabeth is said to have owned a few specimens. But it was not until well after the year 1700 that it became generally available in Europe for use among nobles and commoners alike.

THE CRAZE FOR CHINAWARE

It is hardly to be wondered at that this new product took the western world by storm. The craze for it became insatiable. On the Continent of Europe, and in England, the native pottery was neglected. Everyone who could afford the luxury began to set his table with porcelain and to use fine pieces of it to decorate shelves and cabinets, highboy tops and mantels, and even mirror frames.

The Dutch merchants were the first to import this Chinese ware—or *china* as it came to be called—extensively into Europe; but they were quickly followed by the trading companies of England, France, and other nations. They were progressive, those Dutchmen. No sooner had they discovered the popularity of this Oriental merchandise than they sought out ways of increasing its sale.



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

GEORGE WASHINGTON BORDER—The rich blue butterfly border of this pattern is the same as that which occurs on the Society of the Cincinnati Lowestoft service made for President Washington. See the Magazine *ANTIQUES* for February, 1930, page 132.

They had found the Chinese not only extremely skilful potters, but clever decorators, who knew how to use colors and gold on porcelain, and to fire the painted patterns so as to make them permanent. Also the Chinese were the most accurate copyists in the world, and could faithfully reproduce any design supplied to them by the foreign agents.

FOREIGN DESIGNS FOR CHINESE ARTISTS

This extraordinary ability to imitate was soon put to use. Employing their own artists to prepare designs calculated to appeal to European taste and prejudice, the managers of the different East India Companies would send finished sketches to China for reproduction on porcelain. Favorite among these designs were family coats of arms and crests, and personal monograms enclosed in pseudo-armorial shields. These the diligent Chinese would copy on their native tableware, following the European pattern for the armorial design, but usually clinging to their own notions for the ornament of rims and borders.

The result—a quaint and beautiful mingling of Eastern and Western styles and ideas—found ready patronage in England and on the Continent. Though months were required for delivery, orders poured in for great armorial and monogrammed dinner sets comprising hundreds of pieces, for tea services and for plates by dozens and scores. Such sets became favorite wedding and anniversary gifts of the nobility and the rich merchants. They were adopted as the official table garniture for the formal dinners of the free Continental towns.



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

SCROLL AND SHELL BORDER—This handsome border, in gold outlined with red, appears largely on Lowestoft made for the Dutch market. The gold and red spear-head verge first occurs on European-market Chinese ware about 1750. See the *Magazine ANTIQUES* for August, 1928, page 127; and June, 1929, Cover.

Ship captains who could boast no armorial device had pictures of their ships painted upon porcelain to be sent home to wives and sweethearts, or to daughters who were about to be married.

Beginning in 1784, after the Revolutionary War, when American vessels inaugurated direct trade with the Far East, the United States followed the course of Europe. Shiploads of china, some of it bearing the normal blue and white Chinese decoration, much of it showing special armorial or pseudo-armorial devices, were brought into America.

CHINESE WARE FOR AMERICA

Of the American-market designs, the rarest and most famous is that made for the members of the Society of the Cincinnati, an organization formed in 1783 by the officers of the American Army. All of this Cincinnati china carries the emblem of the Society—an American bald eagle with a symbolic medallion on its breast. Washington owned a set of this ware and so did General Knox and Captain Samuel Shaw, who, after helping to establish the Society, served as commercial agent on the ship *Empress of China*, first American vessel to sail directly to China from a home port.

Other patterns favored by American buyers were those displaying the eagle of the Great Seal of the United States, ships carrying the American flag, the arms of New York State, and mantled shields emblazoned with the owner's monogram.



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

PANELED BORDER — This border of charmingly colored bird and flower panels occurs on armorial china as early as 1735. The rim is in gold, and the spear-head verge in gold outlined with red. *See the Magazine ANTIQUES for August, 1928, page 125.*

WHY IS IT CALLED LOWESTOFT?

For some strange reason, such of this foreign-market Chinese porcelain as survives today is known as *Lowestoft china*. This curious designation finds many explanations, no two of which agree, though the facts seem to be as follows:

On the far eastern coast of England—not distant from Yarmouth—lies the sleepy little fishing village of Lowestoft, which came into being and continued to survive largely because the neighboring North Sea waters afforded great catches of herring. Besides, the port was a convenient one for sailing vessels bound to and from Holland. It seems reasonable to believe that a good deal of Oriental china brought into Holland from the Far East was subsequently trans-shipped to England through this port of Lowestoft, and that, in some such way, the name of the town became associated with a particular type of ware.

Then, too, shortly after 1750, a pottery was erected in Lowestoft and began to manufacture china in imitation of the imported product. The material of this English Lowestoft ware is essentially different from that of the Oriental, but its decoration imitated the Chinese, after a fashion, and thus tended to fix the name Lowestoft alike upon the English and the Oriental ware.

That is the whole story. We may disregard legends to the effect that Chinese porcelain blanks were imported into Lowestoft and there decorated, and that English-made ware was sent to the Orient for a similar purpose. Virtually all of



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

FLORAL FESTOON BORDER — Such floral borders were popular in both English and French markets during the eighteenth century. Their varied colorings, set off with a gold rim and gold and red verge, are exceptionally attractive. Many such borders are illustrated in Sir Algernon Tudor-Craig's *Armorial Porcelain*.

the early so-called Lowestoft sets treasured by English, Continental, and American families were made and decorated in China, to order, for the merchants of the Western World. Their distinguishing feature is a mingling of Eastern and Western elements in the decoration: the borders being usually quite Chinese in character, the rest of the design having an obviously European cast. By extension, the term may justly be applied to all fine tableware which displays similar composite motives.

ENGLISH CHINA SUPERSEDES THE ORIENTAL

We have seen that, in the 1750's, an English factory was established at Lowestoft for the making of tableware in imitation of the Chinese. But, long before that, the same thing was being undertaken in other places, and on a far more important and successful scale. The potteries of England had no intention of being wiped out of existence by Chinese competition. Accordingly they set themselves to the task of improving their clays, of beautifying the forms of their product, and of finding glazes that would not develop cracks. Moreover they educated their own china painters, who, in time, learned to cover the surfaces of the new and refined tableware with decorations often adapted from the Chinese, yet manifestly English in character.

One of the great industrial romances of all time is that of the struggle of the English potters against the invasion of Chinese tableware—and their eventual victory. By the close of the eighteenth century, the practical superiority of



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THE FITZHUGH PATTERN— So-called because a Salem sea captain's wife thus pronounced the Chinese port of Foochow, where her husband bought ware of this design for her to sell at home, while he was on his voyages. The design dates from about the year 1800. *See the Magazine ANTIQUES for August, 1928, page 128.*

the English goods over those of China was generally conceded. As the former improved, the latter deteriorated, and, while still imported, were viewed as relatively cheap and inferior. Prince, noble, and commoner henceforth had their armorial and initialed tableware made at home, and, as their great Chinese sets became depleted through breakage, were content to call upon their local manufacturers to match the old with fresh additions. That is why we find, among many old family sets of china, some pieces of Oriental ware and some of English—but so closely similar in appearance that only an expert can tell them apart.

THE BEGINNING OF SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

In Philadelphia there is said to exist an eighteenth-century Chinese dinner set once owned in England, a considerable part of which is made up of replacements and additions provided by the famous potter Josiah Spode of Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire. This may well be true; for the carefully preserved old pattern books of the Spode factory contain many of these old so-called Lowestoft designs. Indeed Josiah Spode, who is said to have established his business in 1770, was one of the first Englishmen to catch the spirit of Chinese decoration and to adapt it to the requirements of home manufacture. His early ventures in that direction lay in the field of blue underglaze decoration with a pagoda and landscape center and the famous blue butterfly border. Then he branched out into the employment of gold and colors and the utilization of floral and bird motives drawn from Chinese models.



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BUTTERFLY, BAMBOO AND ROSE—A blue Chinese border, with a bamboo and rose wreath in *famille rose* colors, surrounding the armorial center, gives this pattern an unusual distinction.

Patterns originated by Spode and his early successors during the late 1700's and early 1800's continue to be made, and are quite as irresistible as they were more than a century ago, when, in August of the year 1817, Queen Charlotte visited the Spode factory and was enraptured with what she found. A contemporary account of that visit is worth quoting:

"The visit last month of Her Gracious Majesty Queen Charlotte to the Porcelain Manufactory of Mr. Josiah Spode evidences anew Her prodigious interest in the almost innumerable occupations of His Majesty's loyal subjects.

"Mr. Spode, together with Mr. Copeland, received Her Majesty at the entrance to the Manufactory and conducted Her through the different Departments. The Queen was vastly impressed with the modern arrangements of the Porcelain production, and was graciously pleased to order for herself an elegant Dinner Service of Stone China, the beautiful 'Body' lately discovered by Mr. Spode (that equals the famous Porcelain imported by the East India Company), and is already greatly in demand amongst the nobility.

"In connection with the royal visit, we are gratified to learn that the proprietors intend to pictorially commemorate the honour bestowed on our famous Town."

Such ware was Spode's answer to the so-called Chinese Lowestoft. It was, and is today, Spode's Lowestoft—Oriental in its purity of material, its hardness, its shining beauty of surface, its decorative motives; English in its



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

BLUE DIAPER BORDER—This type of blue border, edged with gold spear-heads, according to Sir Algernon Tudor-Craig, came into fashion about 1780. The blue and gold offer an excellent foil for an armorial device in color. *See the Magazine ANTIQUES for August, 1928, page 128.*

superior durability, its consistent quality of form and decoration, its association with family tradition. Not fully Oriental, not entirely Occidental—a happy compromise between the two—such is Spode's Lowestoft—the heirloom china of the future.

OLD PATTERNS FRESHLY REVIVED

Of late, too, the old factory pattern books of more than a century past have been taken down and reviewed by the present managers of the House of Spode. From these volumes has been selected a series of the designs formerly used in the decoration of family services. These are now being reissued on china of the same body that was first employed—a china pleasant to the touch, attractive to the eye, and the more delightful because enhanced with a decorative treatment that is both rich and restrained, aristocratically dignified and inherently elegant.

No pains have been spared to keep faith with the tradition back of this appropriate and beautiful revival, and to render Spode's Lowestoft worthy of the same acceptance today which it enjoyed more than a hundred years ago. The range of patterns is extensive enough to include all the better known historical borders and the various types of armorial devices, ships, and decorative urns, which featured the early decoration. Again, as in the past, it is quite possible to meet the personal requirement of those who wish to have their tableware emblazoned with their own family arms or with a monogram or cypher.



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

THE NIGEL PATTERN—Delicate sprays of *famille rose* flowers were a favorite decoration on Lowestoft china during the first half of the eighteenth century. The diapered circle and the gold and red rim add richness to a dainty decoration. See the *Magazine ANTIQUES* for August, 1928, pages 125 and 126.

THE MAJESTY OF THE DINNER SERVICE

While the accompanying illustrations picture Spode's Lowestoft only in ten-inch plates, the designs are obtainable in full services. Indeed, this is essential to the maintenance of the old tradition, which had its important ceremonial aspects. When, on state occasions, the full panoply of a great dinner service was displayed, the table was set with the soup tureen in the center. Then, according to the size and length of the table, the platters were arranged from end to end, while between each pair of platters rose the majesty of a covered dish.

Much the same system is followed today by the hostess who owns ancestral Lowestoft, though the soup tureen may be filled with flowers, or may stand as an impressive focal decoration flanked by platters piled high with fruit, and with the covered dishes perhaps brimming with sweetmeats. In any case, the arrangement makes for dignity and for an atmosphere of substantial hospitality hardly to be achieved by any other means.

SPODE'S LOWESTOFT FOR THE FUTURE

So, a century and more from now, we may expect our great-great-grandchildren to dress their tables with Spode's Lowestoft, proud of its enduring beauty and of the armorial design that memorializes the ancestors who chose it for their own use in the 1930's.



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT

ROSE SPRAY BORDER — One of the most refined of the Lowestoft designs, because depending for its effect upon the exquisite form and color of the sprays and the perfection of the ware on which they are placed. See Sir Algernon Tudor-Craig's *Armorial Porcelain*, pages 81 and 85.

NOTE

Those readers who wish to find a more comprehensive discussion of Lowestoft china than is possible to the few pages of this brochure are referred to a series of articles which have been appearing in the Magazine *ANTIQUES*. This series, which is based on some years of investigation, offers the clearest and most comprehensive treatment of the subject written in the English language. Its author, Homer Eaton Keyes, who is likewise Editor of the Magazine *ANTIQUES*, has been good enough to review the historical statements here presented and to pronounce them correct.

The authoritative book on armorial porcelain is Sir Algernon Tudor-Craig's *Armoial Porcelain of the Eighteenth Century*, published in London, 1925. Extended references to the use of European designs on Oriental wares will also be found in Dr. George C. Williamson's *The Book of Famille Rose*, London, 1927.



SPODE'S LOWESTOFT—Is obtainable not only in sets of plates, but in full dinner services, tea services, and sets of cups and saucers. The form of the different pieces is as authentic as their decoration. A number of undecorated examples are pictured above.





